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*Brenna Lyons*

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# *Claiming a Lady*

*A Night Warriors Tale*

BRENNALYONS

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Gawen paused at the door to Bavin's home, taking a moment to straighten his tunic. He owed her the courtesy of looking his best when he came for her. He knocked, abruptly aware that his palms were sweating.

*Stand down*, he chastised himself. Bavin was an untried maid. She'd accepted his kiss. She wore his seal, but she likely wouldn't share his bed this night. It would be by Tes's favor alone that she might agree to share it within the month before they were married.

His frustration stirred that simply, and he forced his jaw to unlock...just in time for the door to swing open.

Bavin's father hesitated, then stepped back and waved Gawen in. Was he uncomfortable with the idea that his daughter would soon be experiencing Gawen's kiss and touch? Or did he disapprove but fear Gawen's response to such a thing? In truth, the older man had no choice in the matter, but it wouldn't do to alienate him unnecessarily.

Gawen offered a tip of his head in greeting. "Is Bavin free to walk with me?" he asked formally.

Were Bavin any other woman or Gawen not what he was, her father would be incensed by such a question. Even women promised in marriage were not free to walk unescorted with their future husbands.

Again, he hesitated. "She is. Will you sit?" Olhardt waved a hand in invitation and turned toward the far reaches of the house.

Gawen ambled in, closing the door. He was too nervous to sit, so he stared into the fire, hoping not to appear too anxious for his bride's company. If the man was uncertain about this marriage, eagerness could well push him further.

He turned at the sound of footsteps on the stone, his mouth going dry at the sight of Bavin, freshly scrubbed and dressed in the same gown she'd worn for the choosing, most likely the best gown she owned. She met his eyes, blushing deeply...most likely at the audacity of being so bold in front of her father.

Gawen closed the distance between them, offering his hand

silently. She took it, her color deepening another notch. He managed another tip of his head to her father and led her out of the house and up a path into the woods.

It was several long moments before she broke the silence between them. "I am surprised."

"Of what? That I came to you so quickly?" *Or that I tarried so long?* he taunted himself. Though the entire village would know about Resten's death and Regana's speedy marriage, there was no excuse for neglecting Bavin so long.

She smiled up at him, a spring in her step. "That you haven't kissed me again."

His heart pounded in excitement. "Are you inviting it? Would it...make you uncomfortable for me to request such a thing?" The previous night had been ceremony, and though she'd returned his passion in the safety of the crowd, it was a very different thing to accept such intimacy where it might turn to more.

Bavin seemed to consider that. "Why would it make me uncomfortable, Lord Gawen?"

That had to end. "I am not your lord, Bavin. You are my bride."

She nodded her agreement. "Gawen, then."

His name on her lips sent a shiver of delight up his spine and brought his cock up. To his dismay, her gaze locked on the length of him clearly visible through his trews and tunic.

"How long have you wanted me?" she asked.

"How long?"

His mind was mired in visions of her touching the length she found so interesting. As if in answer, her free hand twitched ever so slightly, and he licked his dry lips. Her scent was sublime, her musk rising at her perusal of his ready state, marking her as ready, as well.

"You were walking the edges of madness when you asked if I still intended to stand." She didn't question it.

"I was," he admitted. *I am.*

"How long have you wanted me in your bed?"

"In my life...not just my bed," he corrected her.

"How long?"

Was there an answer to that he could quantify? He shook his head. "I know when I noticed you as a woman first. I cannot say when that became the need to make you mine."

"When?" There was a note of excitement in her voice that

encouraged him to continue.

“The harvest festival, five years ago. You were cooking with the older women and Kethe. You were barely a woman, only months past the day of your turning. You were smiling, laughing at something one of the others said. Then you turned and looked at me.”

Her voice was soft and wistful. “And you took the tray from my hands,” she recalled. “You carried it to the table and came back for another...and another.”

“I had to look again. You were the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen and remain so.”

“Would you have kissed me?”

Her question surprised him. “Had it not been against the laws of man and Warrior to touch you? Yes. I would have kissed you.”

Bavin stopped, and Gawen turned to face her. He didn’t question her purpose. One moment, he was staring into her eyes. The next, their mouths were meshed together, the length of her body pressed to his.

Gods, but she tasted sweet...and her scent made his head swim. He drank her down, needing all she would give. But how much was that?

Gawen broke off the kiss slowly, staring down at her. He wanted to ask but feared pushing her too fast for comfort.

“You haven’t taken release in one of the widows for nearly a week, Gawen.”

On some level, it shocked him that she knew it. On another, it wasn’t surprising that she did. Knowing he intended to claim her as his own, Gawen’s exploits would be of concern to Bavin. She had the right to her investigation of him.

“And what else did they tell you?”

Her face darkened once more. “How talented a man you are,” she admitted. “Will you...”

“Yes?” When she didn’t continue, he did. “Did something they told you concern you? I would do nothing you found troubling. Surely, you know that.”

“No.” But there was more left unsaid.

“Bavin?”

“Will it be that way between us? The way you were with

them?”

“It will be better. You’re my bride, Bavin.”

“And you didn’t seek them out these past days, because...?”

His fire lit in need. “Because the memory of your smile as you confirmed you’d stand was in my mind. I couldn’t take solace in another without seeing your face, and I wouldn’t be so faithless to you.”

Her breathing hitched. Her hand crept beneath his tunic, tracing the ridge of his cock, from base to head.

Gawen closed his eyes, memorizing every touch. This would have to hold his fire in check until Bavin was ready for more.

“What do you want, Gawen?” she breathed.

“You...when you’re ready.” She deserved the truth. “I will wait for you to become comfortable with—”

Bavin untied one set of laces on his treads, rendering him momentarily mute. “There is no need to be faithless to a willing woman.”

Gawen leaned to her, parting her lips in a tender kiss. She met him without reservation, and her fingers worked at the tie on the other set of laces.

He encircled her wrists with his fingers and guided her hands away, breaking off the kiss with a shake of his head. “I will not be faithless, Bavin. I cannot be. Not now.” He wouldn’t return to the widows, and there was no need for her to rush to this to prevent it. “But I will not hurry you. If you need time to —”

“My body aches for you,” she whispered, her eyes pleading with him. “It has since I knew your intent. No one would dare try to take me from you. This I knew. I have been yours since the moment you asked if I intended to stand.”

His mind was slow recovering from that. Gawen looked around guiltily. This wasn’t right. “Come to my bed then.” He wouldn’t spill her maiden’s blood here.

She nodded. “Your bed. Our bed?” There was a hopeful note in that.

His cock protested the wait. “Our bed,” he agreed.

The walk to his home—soon to be their home—did nothing to cool his blood. If the glances at his raging cock were any indication, it did nothing to cool hers either.

With the door closed behind them, Bavin rose on her toes and circled her arms around Gawen’s neck. He wrapped his

hands around her waist and lifted, marveling at how his big hands overlapped around her tiny body. He would have to be careful. Bavin was no well-used widow to be subjected to a hard pounding.

Her lips played at his jawline, spurring Gawen to motion. He stopped at his bedside, indulging in another heated kiss, groaning at Bavin kicking away her low shoes.

Duty intruded, and he sensed her.

His growl of frustration brought her head back. “What is it?”

His mind worked hard at the problem. “I will give you pleasure, Bavin.” *Just you.* Even spilling on her could result in a child she wasn’t prepared for.

She smiled at that. “I trust you will, but what is wrong? What makes you grumble and growl? Am I—”

“No. Never. It is—” *She is an innocent. I must watch my words.* “Your cycle, Bavin. You are fertile tonight.” If he indulged himself, she’d surely catch pregnant. He wasn’t Veriel. The last thing he’d do would be force this on his chosen.

Her smile disappeared. “You don’t wish a child?”

“Of course I do. What *Krieger* wouldn’t want a child of his chosen?” The need was ingrained in them.

Bavin seemed to have problems forming words. “Lay with me and explain. I fear I am lost.”

Gawen lowered her to the bed and settled next to her, careful to keep his boot soles off the edge. Finding the words to explain his concerns wasn’t easy. It certainly wasn’t how he’d pictured their first words in their shared bed to pass.

He forced himself on. “If I love you fully tonight, it cannot be undone, and you will likely catch pregnant from it. One doesn’t rush into creating life, Bavin.” He raised a hand to still her rising protest. “Be sure. It is all I ask. Be sure that you wish to carry my child so soon...and I will endeavor to make it a reality.” Just saying it had his cock straining at the loosened laces of his trews.

She bit at her lower lip, seemingly thinking hard on the matter. It was both a relief and torture. Bavin was making a reasoned choice. He wasn’t convincing her to it. But if she refused him, it would be nearly a week of maddening loveplay

before he could indulge in more.

But he'd come to her with that expectation in mind. Surely, the chance of a child wouldn't force him past reason now.

Bavin's hand pressed to his thigh and trailed upward, taking his measure again.

Gawen forced a deep breath...then a second and third. "Bavin?" He kept his voice calm and even, inviting her honest answer.

"Love me fully, Gawen. Don't make me wait for you any longer."

His cock bucked against her hand, urging him on.

\* \* \* \*

Bavin expected bruising kisses and a fierce, fast mating in claim of her. Instead, Gawen lowered his head, urging her lips apart for kisses so deep they stole her breath away.

In between them, his tunic disappeared, then his boots and treads. Gawen paused, giving her the chance to survey every luscious line of his body.

She licked her lips, reaching for her dress, but Gawen's hands were there first. He shook his head, gathering the fabric between his big hands and drawing it up.

Her body responded fiercely to it, the heat between her woman's folds spilling over in preparation for Gawen's cock. *Or his mouth.* She shivered in delight at that. The widows had told her about Gawen's talented mouth.

He paused, meeting her eyes. "What is it?"

Her cheeks burned in embarrassment. How could she say such a thing to him?

Gawen nodded grimly and started to ease her skirt down.

"No," she gasped.

"Bavin, if you are not certain—"

"I am."

"Your body says something different."

She shook her head, denying it. How could he say so when she wept and ached to accept him?

"You shudder and—"

"Not in fear," she protested. "Not in revulsion."

He closed his eyes, then opened them again, seemingly working at that. A tentative smile pulled up at his lips, and his eyes glittered. "They told you about something...something you

wish to feel.” Gawen didn’t question it.

Bavin seized the moment to answer. “Yes, they did.”

Her dress slid up again, slowly, a torture to her rioting senses. “Let me see if I can guess what it might be,” he purred.

The dress passed her knees, and Bavin bit back a demand for him to go faster.

“What is it?” His voice was soft and encouraging. “Tell me, Bavin.”

The bold words stuck in her throat. Cool room air touched her heated core, and she thrust her hips up, gasping for breath.

The fabric stopped at her waist. “Tes and Ani, yes.”

“Yes,” she repeated. She’d promise him anything he wished for this.

“It’s my mouth you want,” he guessed.

“Yes.”

He moved slowly, seemingly in a daze. His fingertips touched here and there, wringing gasps from her.

Gawen parted her thighs, opening Bavin’s legs wide around his body. He retreated slightly, his head lowering at such a pace as to intensify her ache for him into a pounding.

The first lick over the nub of sensation nearly stopped her heart in pleasure. She’d touched it as she’d prepared for him, wanting to be clean and appealing for him. It had felt wonderful, but it was nothing compared to Gawen’s tongue stroking against it.

He stroked again, and she moaned, unable to be silent as she’d been when she’d bathed herself. The strokes came faster, and she buried her hand in his hair, offering her encouragement in the only way she could now that words had deserted her. His face retreated, and she growled in protest.

“Remove your dress, Bavin.” It wasn’t an order. Gawen’s voice was soft and soothing.

“Why?”

“I wish to shed your maiden’s blood as painlessly as possible, but your dress will surely stain, as it is.”

“Now?” The thought of his length filling her was both frightening and energizing. She’d thought there’d be more time to prepare for it.

“No, but when the moment is upon us, I wish to follow it...if

that pleases you.”

Bavin started pulling at the dress, her heart hammering in excitement. “Yes. Oh, Gawen, yes.”

He returned to her sensitized core with a grumbled curse, breathing the last of it into her body. His licking was more avid, stealing her ability to breathe in a steady stream.

Just as she flung the offending clothing at the head of his wide bed, the licking became sucking, first at the nub, then lower. Bavin cried out in surprise. His tongue dipped inside, and she arched her neck and screamed at the unexpected depth of pleasure.

The muscles of her belly and thighs tightened, and she arched further into his ravenous mouth. Gods, but she hadn’t believed the widows. What a fool she’d been to disbelieve them. Bavin had always known Gawen was capable of nearly anything. Why wouldn’t he be capable of stealing the world from her senses this way, until all that existed was Gawen manipulating her body as if it was one of his sacred weapons.

She’d watched him once, making the weapon dance over his hand at practice. Right now, it felt as if he was doing the same to her body.

Gawen returned to her nub, sucking hard...and the world exploded in color and sensation. The sounds, if there were any, were drowned out by the rushing of blood in her ears.

His mouth retreated, leaving stroke after stroke of pleasure pounding at her body. Bavin noted her lower body leaving the bed, but she couldn’t piece together why it would.

The next fractured moment was full of conflicting sensation. She was full, stretched tight...probably around Gawen’s cock. Pain and indescribable pleasure wrestled for her attention. Her muscles undulated around his length, supplying a patchwork of information about what it felt like to be impaled by her husband.

There was no making sense of the cacophony of conflicting input. Her muscles tightened again then released in waves. Bavin arched her back, venting a scream into the suddenly-heated air.

\* \* \* \*

Gawen groaned at the feeling of Bavin’s body exploding into a second climax. She screamed, but it wasn’t in pain. As he’d hoped, taking her at the height of climax had confused her

body and masked her pain.

A need to know she'd bled for him gnawed at Gawen, and he eased back. The sight of the dark blood staining his cock nearly sent him over, and the gush of it coursing down her body and to the bed linens, no doubt pushed out by her continuing contractions, had the animal in him raising its head to howl in triumph.

Bavin gasped out a complaint, begging him to return to her. He let one more drop fall and slid to the hilt, forcing himself to a slow, steady advance. She cried out, her back arching again, leaving nearly her entire weight in his large hands.

The next few thrusts were less restrained, and Bavin wrapped her legs around his waist. Gawen stared between their bodies, feasting on the sight of her precious blood...on his cock sliding in and out of his mate's body.

*My mate.* Bavin would carry his sons. She would share his bed and no other. The *flutch* roared out again at that thought.

*I have to seal her as my mate. It has to be tonight. I'm chancing a son with her before sealing.* Every instinct told him that was unacceptable.

*No.* Bavin had agreed to share his bed. There was little chance she was ready for that. She probably viewed the length of time until the marriage ceremony with relief.

That firmly in mind, Gawen resolved not to ask.

"Gods, yes," she breathed, coming back to her senses after her second release, he guessed.

Her hands covered his, and her hips moved within his grip, seeking a specific touch of his cock within her. Gawen obliged her, wondering how many times he could force her over before he was forced to release himself. In truth, he was surprised he'd lasted as long as he had.

"Will you seal to me, Gawen?"

The question was so unexpected, he faltered in his thrust, stopping halfway inside her. Bavin circled her hips, mewling in delight.

"Gawen?"

"You want me to seal before the marriage night?" he managed to gasp out.

Her hips circled again. "If my father wouldn't object to it,

I'd have you ask Thorald to marry us tonight.”

He sank down over her, pushing in to the hilt and stilling there. “Would you?”

Bavin nodded shakily, attempting to move her hips beneath his bulk. “You...” She grasped at his arms, her inner muscles hinting at another climax building in her. “Oh...Gawen.”

“You wish me to seal to you before we are joined?”

“We are joined.” Her breathing was ragged and her eyes half-closed in what appeared to be bliss.

“Say it, Bavin. Do you wish it?” If she did, he was more than capable of following through.

“Yes. I want you to seal to me.”

“Be sure.”

“I am. Gawen, please—”

He started thrusting again, more animal than man, burning in the need to seal their souls. Bavin's body responded fiercely, her inner muscles contracting around him.

Gawen indulged this time, roaring as his body emptied into hers, his breath catching in his lungs at the peace and tenderness stealing over his soul. In the glow of it, he touched Bavin's face, marveling at the gentle streak only she and Regana brought out in him.

\* \* \* \*

*Two weeks later*

“Tell us, Bavin.” Anabilia fairly vibrated in excitement.

Bavin felt her cheeks heat. “Yes. We are sharing a bed,” she confirmed the rumors. Laughs and little squeals punctuated the air, and she darkened further.

“How long did he wait?” Evfemia asked in a whisper, her eyes wide in wonder.

“He didn't,” she confided. “My maiden's blood stained his bed the first night, and he sealed before his...manly parts tasted air once more.”

Ingela's mouth dropped open in shock. “You didn't! Bavin, that's...that's—”

“Gods, it's wonderful,” she replied, her heart aching at the hours until Gawen came to *walk* with her again.

“Then why aren't you sharing his home?” Lela inquired.

Bavin looked around, spying her father on the other side of the marketplace. “I'm certain my father knows I share Gawen's

bed, but he is not prepared to accept that..." How could she say it?

"What?" Lenne and Ingela asked together. Lenne continued. "What doesn't your father know? That Gawen has sealed to you?"

"Well, he doesn't know it," Bavin agreed. "But..."

"Oh, tell us, Bavin," Anabilia urged her. "Please. Ditrich has only just started playing at love games with me, and Evfemia has fared no better. Lela, Lenne, and Ingela haven't had more than a kiss yet."

"Your own fault," Bavin imparted. "Trust me. If you show interest in it, your men will gladly play at nearly whatever you wish with them."

"What doesn't your father know?" Lela asked.

Bavin smiled, wrapping her arms around her waist in contentment. "I carry Gawen's child. I was at the fertile time when we... Gawen confirmed it for me a few days ago."

For a moment, no one commented. Then a second round of joyous squeals issued forth.

Anabilia wrapped her arms around Bavin. "You are so lucky. I cannot wait to carry for Ditrich."

"Then you must urge him to take you fully to his bed," Bavin counseled.

"How does a woman do such a thing?" Lela asked, her frustration seeping into her tone.

Ingela gaped at her, clearly scandalized by the question.

"Well, I want to know," Lela defended herself.

The other women laughed, and Ingela joined them. "I do, as well," she admitted.

Bavin opened her mouth to instruct them, the words sticking in her throat at the shadow creeping over her. She turned her head, panning her gaze up to meet Gawen's eyes. One brow was raised in amusement.

Forgetting herself and their surroundings, Bavin threw herself into Gavin's arms. His mouth closed on hers in a true lover's kiss, and his arms encircled her, pressing a bundle of something soft to her spine.

After a moment, he broke off the kiss. His lips trailed to her ear. "And will you urge me?" he teased in a whisper.

BRENNA LYONS

Bavin's face burned in embarrassment. "Are you angry with me?" She hoped he wasn't, but who knew how a man would take such a discussion.

"You are making me the envy of all of my brethren. Why would I be angry?"

She laughed.

Gawen pressed a quick kiss to her lips, pulling the bundle from behind her and settling it into her hands.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Cloth. I thought you might like a new dress or two for the ceremony...and to start on clothing for our son."

Her breathing hitched at that. "I would. Oh, Gawen, thank you."

His smile was wide and brilliant. He leaned to press a soft kiss to her lips. That close, he whispered a parting comment. "For each of my brothers that finds relief from your...instruction, I will grant you pleasures unlike any you've felt so far," he promised.

She stared at him, dumbstruck.

"Thank you for easing their burden, Bavin. I will come to walk with you this evening."

With that, he raised his head, tipped it—most probably to her father—and hurried back to practice.

She watched him go, her heart skipping at the interplay of muscle she knew so well. Bavin returned to the circle of women, holding the fabric to her heart.

"What is it?" Evfemia asked, fingering the edge of the bundle.

"Fine cloth to make a new dress from...and wraps for our child together." She smiled at the thought of it.

"How do we urge them?" Anabilia inquired. "Please, tell us."

Bavin chuckled. "You can start with inquiries about what they do with the widows and what you've heard men do...or even with what they wish to do with you."

The others leaned closer, hanging on every word she spoke.

"And if that fails?" Lela asked.

"Try touching his member while he kisses you. He is certain to ask if you want more."

There was a moment of silence.

"Did you do that?" Ingela asked. She didn't sound nearly as scandalized as she had moments before.

Bavin smiled, nodding her agreement.

The others shared looks that spoke their uncertainty. Then the questions began in earnest. If all of them weren't bedded fully by the end of the week, it wouldn't be for lack of trying.

\* \* \* \*

*The following night*

Bavin gasped against Gawen's marauding tongue, acutely aware of his fingers working her skirts up. They were in the forest, not even halfway to their bed, but he seemed to be intent on taking her on his cloak on the forest floor.

*Yes! Now!* She had no clue what had prompted this, but the gods knew she wanted it.

As if in answer, Gawen worked the ties on his treads loose and shoved them away. His fingers played at her sheath long enough to confirm her readiness and then spread her wide for his the crown of his cock.

Gawen slipped inside, stretching her one muscle at a time. She clawed at his tunic, gasping out pleas for more.

"You are such a good leader," he breathed. "Such a good match for me."

Bavin stared at him, confused by that announcement. "Leader?" She was no leader.

His smile was wide and warm, his hips moving back and forth in torturously slow thrusts that scattered her thinking mind. She gasped out a denial that she was a leader.

Gawen chuckled. "Two of my brothers claimed their mates last eve, Bavin. Your instruction was very effective."

"And will your instruction be likewise?" she managed to ask.

"After you come for me here, I will spend half the night *instructing* you in our bed. That will be payment enough for one of them."

"Half..." She couldn't fathom so long in his bed. Gawen always came for her before sunset and delivered her home close after. His hunting came first. *And it should.*

"When the last claims his mate, you will spend the whole night with me."

BRENNA LYONS

“But... You said—”

“Your father suspects we bed together, Bavin. He will simply assume this is our first night bedding fully. He will know the truth of how long we have when your belly fills with my son. I’m certain he will survive the occasional night of your empty bed in preparation for when it will be permanent.”

She couldn’t form words to that. Even if she could have thanked the gods or him for so precious a gift, her contracting body—followed by the flow of his potent seed—stole her ability to speak.

Gawen laid a kiss on her forehead, humming in contentment. “Say you will be my lady and lie in my bed with me,” he requested.

“Always.” It was the only word that made sense, in answer to that.

## *About the Author*

Brenna Lyons wears many hats, sometimes all on the same day: former president of EPIC, author of more than 65 published works, columnist for ERWA, special needs teacher, wife, mother... In addition, she's a member in good standing of MWW, RWU, WPM, TELL, IWOFA and Broad Universe.

In her first six years published in novel-length, Brenna has finaled for seven EPIES, three PEARLS (taking honorable mention second to NYT Bestseller Angela Knight), two CAPAS, a Dream Realm Award and has won Spintetinglers' Book of the Year for 2007.

Brenna has been termed "one of the most deviant erotic minds in the publishing world...not for the weak." (Rachelle for Fallen Angels Reviews) She writes milieu-heavy dark fiction, mainly science fiction, fantasy and horror—straight genre, romance and erotic crosses—poetry, articles and essays.

With degrees in accounting and computer programming, backgrounds in everything from teaching to clerking, tracking fraud suspects to working for the Air Force and the Navy as a civilian, it's a strange irony that Brenna Lyons will become best known for her first love...writing.

Brenna enjoys talking to readers and can be reached via her site at <http://www.brennalyons.com/>.